

T H E

ABORIGINAL BRITONS,

A P O E M.

BY GEORGE RICHARDS, B. A.

FELLOW OF ORIEL COLLEGE, OXFORD.

—Genus humanum multò fuit illud in arvis
Durius. LUCRETIVS.

—Quæ
Desperat tractata nitefcere posse, relinquit.
HORACE.

OXFORD:

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M,DCC,XCI.

TO THE HONOURABLE

LEWIS THOMAS WATSON,

OF

LEES COURT, IN THE COUNTY OF KENT.

PR
5225
R38a

S I R,

ACCCEPT this small testimony of respect and esteem. To every individual of our island the state of its first inhabitants forms a subject of curious and useful enquiry. Such an investigation must be more particularly interesting to you, Sir, from your intimate connection with a County, which through its unsubmitting spirit of patriotism ennobled the early annals of Britain by enforcing conditions of peace on a victorious Invader ; and in a remoter period, among our Aboriginal Forefathers, commenced the illustrious career of national intrepidity and prowess by repelling Julius from our shores.

I have the honour to be,

S I R,

Your faithful and most obedient Servant,

GEORGE RICHARDS.

S U B J E C T.

*On the State of the Aboriginal Britons previous to the Refinements
introduced by the Romans.*

T H E A R G U M E N T.

ADDRESS to the first Navigators of the South-Seas—Wild state of the country—contrasted with Italy as improved by culture—Aboriginal Britons considered as individuals—the Man—the Woman—Considered as to their national character—Their domestic state—promiscuous concubinage—ignorance of other countries—description of a day in time of peace, including the most striking circumstances of their domestic œconomy—Their wars—fondness for war—internal dissensions and their consequences—manner of fighting—behaviour after a defeat—treatment of captives after a victory—Religion—the objects, which give rise to natural religion—Druid Grove—Magic rites, and human sacrifices—Bards—Doctrines—Transmigration and immortality of the soul and its effects—Characteristics of Liberty in the savage state of this island—its extinction in the early stages of our Monarchy—its revival and influence in the present civilized state of manners, as producing public security, giving rise to public works, and calling forth the powers of the mind.

T H E

A B O R I G I N A L B R I T O N S.

YE fons of Albion, who with venturous sails
In unknown oceans caught Antarctic gales ;
Dar'd with bold prow the boisterous main explore,
Where never keel had plow'd the wave before ;
Saw stars unnam'd illumine other skies,
Which ne'er had shone on European eyes ;
View'd on the coast the wondering Savage stand,
Uncouth, and fresh from his Creator's hand ;
While woods and tangling brakes, where wild he ran,
Bore a rough semblance of primeval man—

A form like this, illustrious souls, of yore
 Your own Britannia's sea-girt island wore :
 Ere Danish lances blush'd with Ælla's blood ;
 Or blue-ey'd Saxons fail'd on Medway's flood ;
 Or Dover's towering cliff from high descried
 Cæsar's bold barks, which stemm'd a deep untried.

Through fleecy clouds the balmy spring-tide smil'd ;
 But all it's sweets were wafted on a wild :
 In vain mild autumn shone with mellowing gleam ;
 No bending fruitage blush'd beneath its beam.
 Rudely o'erspread with shadowy forests lay
 Wide trackless wastes, that never saw the day :
 Rich fruitful plains, now waving deep with corn,
 Frown'd rough and shaggy with the tangled thorn :
 Through joyless heaths, and valleys dark with woods,
 Majestic rivers roll'd their useless floods :
 Full oft the hunter check'd his ardent chase,
 Dreading the latent bog and green morafs :
 While, like a blasting mildew, wide were spread
 Blue thickening mists in stagnant marshes bred.

O'er scenes thus wild adventurous Cæsar stray'd,
 And joyless view'd the conquests he had made;
 And blest'd Italia's happier plains and skies,
 Through purest air where yellow olives rise;
 From elm to elm where stretching tendrils twine,
 Bending with clusters of the purple vine:
 While, spread o'er sunny hill and verdant wood,
 Stray the white flocks, which drink Clitumnus' flood.

Rude as the wilds around his sylvan home
 In savage grandeur see the Briton roam.
 Bare were his limbs, and strung with toil and cold,
 By untam'd nature cast in giant-mould.
 O'er his broad brawny shoulders loosely flung
 Shaggy and long his yellow ringlets hung.
 His waist an iron-belted falchion bore,
 Massy, and purpled deep with human gore:
 His scarr'd and rudely-painted limbs around
 Fantastic horror-striking figures frown'd,
 Which, monster-like, ev'n to the confines ran
 Of nature's work, and left him hardly man.

His knitted brows and rolling eyes impart
 A direful image of his ruthless heart ;
 Where war and human blood-shed brooding lie,
 Like thunders lowering in a gloomy sky.

But you, illustrious Fair Ones, wont to brave
 Helvellin's storms, and sport in Darwent's wave,
 To your high worth submit the savage flood,
 As Gambia's lions reverence princely blood.
 He made no rubied lip nor sparkling eye
 The shrine and god of his idolatry ;
 But, proudly bending to a just controul,
 Bow'd in obeisance to the female foul ;
 And deem'd, some effluence of the Omniscent mind
 In woman's beauteous image lay enshrin'd ;
 With inspiration on her bosom hung,
 And flow'd in heavenly wisdom from her tongue.
 Fam'd among warrior-chiefs the crown she wore ;
 At freedom's call the gory falchion bore ;
 Rul'd the triumphant car ; and rank'd in fame
 Bonduca's with Caractacus's name.

No tender virgin heard the impassion'd youth
 Breathe his warm vows, and swear eternal truth :
 No fire, encircled by a blooming race,
 View'd his own features in his infant's face :
 The savage knew not wedlock's chaster rite ;
 The torch of Hymen pour'd a common light ;
 As passion fir'd, the lawless pair were blest'd ;
 And babes unfather'd hung upon the breast.

Such was the race, who drank the light of day,
 When lost in western waves Britannia lay.
 Content they wander'd o'er their heaths and moors,
 Nor thought, that ocean roll'd round other shores.
 Viewing the fires, that blaz'd around their skies,
 Mid the wide world of waters set and rise :
 They vainly deem'd, the twinkling orbs of light
 For them alone illum'd the vault of night ;
 For them alone the golden lamp of day
 Held its bright progress through the heav'n's high way.

When the chill breeze of morning overhead
 Wav'd the dark boughs, that roof'd his sylvan bed,

Up the light Briton sprung—to chace the deer
 Through Humber's vales, or heathy Cheviot drear.
 Languid at noon his fainting limbs he cast
 On the warm bank, and sought his coarse repast.
 With acorns, shaken from the neighbouring oak,
 Or sapless bark, that from the trunk he broke,
 His meal he made; and in the cavern'd dell
 Drank the hoarse wave, that down the rough rocks fell.
 At eve retracing slow his morning road
 With wearied feet he gain'd his wild abode.
 No city rose with spires and turrets crown'd;
 No iron war from rocky ramparts frown'd:
 But plain and simple, in the shadowy wood,
 The shapeless rude-constructed hamlets stood:
 O'er the deep trench an earthy mound arose,
 To guard the sylvan town from beasts and foes.
 The crackling fire, beneath the hawthorn shade,
 With chearful blaze illum'd the darksome glade.
 Oftimes beneath the sheltering oak was spread
 With leaves and spoils of beasts the rustic bed:
 In open sky he rests his head, and sees
 The stars, that twinkle through the waving trees.

On his bare breast the chilling dews descend ;
 His yellow locks the midnight tempests rend ;
 Around—the empty wolf in hunger prowls,
 And shakes the lonely forest with his howls :
 Yet health and toil weigh down the sense, and steep
 His wearied aching limbs in balmy sleep ;
 Till the pale twilight opes the glimmering glades,
 And slowly gains upon the mid-wood shades.

But ah ! unwelcome rose the peaceful morn
 On Albion's sons, for war and glory born.

Lo ! how Britannia's woods and hills resound
 With martial yells, and blaze with arms around !
 War is their sport : at day-spring forth they go
 With spear and shield, and find or make a foe :
 Join the wild fight ; and with the setting sun
 Bear home their plunder, and the war is done.
 Twixt bordering tribes eternal discords reign'd ;
 Not foreign foes these native feuds restrain'd :
 Else nurs'd in arms, and prodigal of breath,
 And, rest of freedom, nobly wooing death,

Had Albion's warlike states united pour'd
 The god-like vengeance of the patriot sword ;
 Julius had steer'd with daring helm in vain
 To isles embosom'd in the Atlantic main ;
 Nor Rome's imperial eagle, borne on high,
 Had spread her pinions in our Northern sky.

Furious, as mountain beasts, the tribes engage,
 With yells, and clanging arms, and frantic rage.
 Rapid the Briton hurls the bolts of war,
 Mounted, like Fate, upon his scythed car!
 Resistless scours the plain, and bursts the files,
 As mad Tornadoes sweep the Indian isles ;
 The scythes and hooks with mangled limbs hung round,
 Yet quick, and writhing ghastly with the wound :
 Adown the madding wheels in torrents pour
 The empurpled smoking streams of human gore :
 While high in air the sighs and shrieks and groans
 Ascend, one direful peal of mortal moans.
 Pale, panic-struck, and fix'd as in a trance,
 The Romans stood, and drop'd the useless lance :

And

And fear'd, their venturous banners were unfurl'd
 Beyond the confines of the mortal world ;
 And more than men, horrific in their might,
 Dar'd them from Albion's cliffs to fatal fight.

Thus fought Britannia's sons :—but when o'erthrown,
 More keen and fierce the flame of freedom shone.
 Ye woods, whose cold and lengthen'd tracts of shade
 Rose on the day, when sun and stars were made ;
 Waves of Lodore, that from the mountain's brow
 Tumble your flood, and shake the vale below ;
 Majestic Skiddaw, round whose trackless steep
 Mid the bright sun-shine darksome tempests sweep :
 To you the patriot fled : his native land
 He spurn'd, when proffer'd by a conqueror's hand :
 In you to roam at large : to lay his head
 On the bleak rock, unclad, unhous'd, unfed :
 Hid in the aguish fen whole days to rest,
 The numbing waters gather'd round his breast :
 To see Despondence cloud each rising morn,
 And dark Despair hang o'er the years unborn :

Yet here, ev'n here, he greatly dar'd to lie,
 And drain the luscious dregs of liberty ;
 Outcast of nature, fainting, wafted, wan,
 To breathe an air his own, and live a Man.

But when with conquest crown'd, he taught his foes,
 What free-born man on free-born man bestows.
 He, in the pride and insolence of war,
 Ne'er bound the indignant captive to his car ;
 Nor with ignoble toils or servile chains
 Debas'd the blood, that swells the hero's veins ;
 Nor meanly barter'd for unworthy gold
 The soul, that animates the human mould :
 But reverenc'd kindred valour, though o'erthrown ;
 Disdain'd to hear a warrior meanly moan ;
 Gave him to die ; and by the generous blow
 Restor'd that freedom he had lost below.

For simple nature taught his soul to rise
 To nobler powers, and realms beyond the skies.

Though to his view the Almighty Voice had ne'er
 Stay'd the proud sun amid his bright career ;

Pour'd

Pour'd from the flinty rock the cryftal ftream ;
 Or fhed on fightlefs eyes the gladfome beam ;
 Bad the deep waters of the main divide,
 And ope an highway through the pathlefs tide ;
 Or ftiffen'd corfes, cold and pale in death,
 Blufh with new life, and heave again with breath !
 Yet gazing round him he beheld the God
 Hold in all nature's works his dread abode :
 He faw him beaming in the filver moon,
 Effulgent burning in the blaze of noon,
 On the dark bofom of the ftorm reclin'd,
 Speaking in thunder, riding on the wind,
 And, 'mid the earthquake's awful riot hurl'd,
 Shaking the deep foundations of the world.

Hence Superftition fprung in elder time,
 Wild as the foil, and gloomy as the clime.

Midft rocks and wafte the Grove tremendous rofe :
 O'er the rude altars hung in dread repofe
 A twilight pale ; like the dim fickly noon,
 When the mid-fun retires behind the moon.

From founding caverns rush'd the darksome flood ;
 Each antique trunk was stain'd with human blood.
 'Twas fung, that birds in terror fled the shade ;
 That lightnings harmless round the branches play'd ;
 And, in the hour of fate, the Central Oak
 Shook with the spirit of the god, and spoke.
 The Roman check'd awhile his conquering band,
 And dropt the imperial Eagle from his hand ;
 And seem'd, while shuddering borne through Mona's wood,
 To tread the confines of the Stygian flood.

What direful rites these gloomy haunts disgrace,
 Bane of the mind, and shame of man's high race !
 'Twas deem'd, the circles of the waving wand,
 The mystic figures, and the muttering band,
 Held o'er all nature's works as powerful sway,
 As the great Lord and Maker of the day.
 Rocks, by infernal spells and magic prayer,
 Shook from their base, and trembled high in air.
 The blasted stars their fading light withdrew ;
 The labouring moon shed down a baleful dew ;

Spirits of hell aerial dances led ;
 And rifted graves gave up the pale cold dead.
 Imperial Man, creation's Lord and Pride,
 To crown the sacrificial horrors, died :
 That Hefus, direly pleas'd, in joyous mood,
 Might flesh their swords, and glut their scythes with blood ;
 And Taranis, amidst his tempests, smile,
 And roll innocuous thunders o'er their isle.

By rites thus dread the Druid Priests impress'd
 A sacred horror on the savage breast.

Hail heav'n-born Seers, whose magic fingers strung
 The Cambrian lyre ; who Loctrine's triumphs sung
 To the dark haunts of Snowdon's icy caves,
 Plinlimmon's cliffs, and Deva's haunted waves ;
 Or where, as Vaga roll'd her winding flood,
 High on the grey rocks wav'd the hanging wood.
 Ye, wandering frequent by romantic streams,
 With harps, that glitter'd to the moon's pale beams,
 Sooth'd by your midnight hymns the warrior's ghost,
 Whose cold bones whiten'd Arvon's dreary coast.

Ye sung the courses of the wandering moon ;
 The sun-beam darken'd in the blaze of noon ;
 The stars unerring in their glittering spheres ;
 The sure procession of the circling years ;
 And the dread Powers, that rule the world on high,
 And hold celestial synods in the sky.
 When hostile nations met with barbarous clang,
 And the wild heath with yelling squadrons rang ;
 When beams of light from ferried lances stream'd,
 And vivid flashes o'er the high heavens gleam'd :
 Fir'd by your magic songs, the Briton pour'd
 A tenfold fury ; dar'd the uplifted sword ;
 Envy'd the shades of chiefs in battle slain ;
 And burn'd to join them on the etherial plain.
 For warrior Souls, ye sung, would deathless bloom,
 When the cold limbs lay mouldering in the tomb :
 From the pale stiffning corsets wing their flight,
 And rise in kindred mould to life and light ;
 Again in arms fill the dire yell of war ;
 Again to havoc drive the scythed car,
 Till earth and air and seas should sink in flame,
 The fiery deluge melting nature's frame :

When,

When, amidst blazing orbs, the warrior-soul,
 Borne through the milky way and starry pole,
 Would painless tenant through eternal years
 Mansions of purest bliss in brighter spheres :
 In martial sports engage its kindred shades,
 Tame the wild steeds, and brandish gleaming blades :
 Or on the clouds reclin'd, with breast on fire,
 Lift the heroic strains of Cadwall's lyre ;
 In Mador's verse renew its mortal toils ;
 And shine through Hoel's songs in hostile spoils..

In Albion's ancient days, midst northern snows,
 Hardy and bold, immortal FREEDOM rose..
 She roam'd the sounding margin of the deep,
 Conway's wild bank, and Cader's craggy steep :
 A bloody wolf-skin o'er her back was spread ;
 An axe she bore ; and wild weeds grac'd her head.
 On Snowdon's cliffs reclin'd she watch'd on high
 The tempest-driven clouds, that cross'd the sky ;
 Or caught with listening ear the founding gale,
 When the dread war-song shook the distant dale..

At battle's close she roam'd the enfanguin'd plain,
 And gaz'd the threatening aspects of the slain.
 Now from ignoble sloth she rarely rose,
 For savage freedom sinks to mute repose ;
 Now to wild joys, and the bowl's maddening powers
 Gave up the torpid sense and listless hours ;
 Now joyful saw the naked sword display'd,
 Though brother's blood flow'd reeking from the blade.
 By tyrants sunk she rose more proudly great,
 As ocean swells indignant in the strait ;
 And, borne in chains from Cambria's mountains bleak,
 Rais'd virtue's generous blush on Cæsar's cheek.

But ah ! full many a dark and stormy year
 She dropt o'er Albion's isle the patriot tear.
 Retir'd to mountains from the craggy dell
 She caught the Norman curfeu's tyrant knell :
 Sad to her view the baron's castle frown'd
 Bold from the steep, and aw'd the plains around :
 She forrowing heard the papal thunders roll,
 And mourn'd the ignoble bondage of the soul :

She

She blush'd, O Cromwell, blush'd at Charles's doom ;
And wept, misguided Sidney, o'er thy tomb.

But now reviv'd she boasts a purer cause,
Refin'd by science, form'd by generous laws :
High hangs her helmet in the banner'd hall,
Nor sounds her clarion but at honor's call.
Now walks the land with olive chaplets crown'd,
Exalting worth, and beaming safety round :
With secret joy and conscious pride admires
The patriot spirit, which herself inspires :
Sees barren wastes with unknown fruitage bloom ;
Sees Labour bending patient o'er the loom ;
Sees Science rove through academic bowers ;
And peopled Cities lift their spiry towers :
Trade swells her sails, wherever ocean rolls,
Glow's at the line, and freezes at the poles :
While through unwater'd plains and wondering meads
Waves not its own the obedient River leads.

But chief the god-like Mind, which bears impress'd
Its Maker's glorious image full confest ;

Nobleſt of works created ; more divine,
Than all the ſtarry worlds, that nightly ſhine ;
Form'd to live on, unconſcious of decay,
When the wide univerſe ſhall melt away :
The Mind, which, hid in ſavage breſts of yore,
Lay, like Golconda's gems, an uſeleſs ore ;
Now greatly dares ſublimeſt aims to ſcan ;
Enriches ſcience, and ennobles man ;
Unveils the ſemblance, which it's God beſtow'd ;
And draws more near the fount, from whence it flow'd.

N O T E S.

But you, illustrious Fair Ones, p. 12. l. 5.] Inesse enim sanctum quid et providum fœminis putant. Tac. de moribus Germ. Ἀπαντες γὰρ τῆς δεισιδαιμονίας ἀρχηγὸς οἰονταὶ τὰς γυναῖκας. Strabo, l. 7.—What is said of the ancient German women is applied by Mr. Mafon, and our early historians, to our countrywomen of earlier ages. The important offices, which they filled in the Government, so unusual in the Savage State, fully justify this application.

Wedlock's chaster rite, p. 13. l. 5.] Uxores habent deni duodenique inter se communes.

Si qui sunt ex his nati, eorum *habentur* liberi, a quibus primum virgines quæque ductæ sunt. Cæsar de bello Gallico.

Or sapless bark, p. 14. l. 6.] Dio Nicæus says, that the Britons in the woods would live upon roots or bark of trees.

Julius had steer'd, p. 16. l. 3.] Vide Tacitus.

Clanging arms, ibid. l. 8.] Their arms are a shield and short spear, in the lower end whereof is a piece of brass, like an apple, that by shaking it they may terrify the enemy.—Camden's Britannia, taken from Dio Nicæus, out of Xiphilin's Epitome.

Hid in the aguish fen, p. 17. l. 17.] Many ancient writers assert, that the Britons in their retreat would hide themselves in the bogs up to their chins in water.—Dio Nicæus, &c. &c.

But when with conquest crown'd, p. 18. l. 5.] For the train of thought through this paragraph, the author is indebted to a speech of Caractacus in Mr. Mafon's Tragedy.

'Twas sung, that birds, p. 20. l. 3.] Vide Lucan's Description of a Druid's Grove. B. 3.

Witb

With harps, that glitter'd, p. 21. l. 18.] For the image in this line the author is indebted to Mr. Maſon's Caraëtacus.

Wild weeds grac'd her head, p. 23, l. 16.] Vide Chatterton's Ode to Freedom.

And, borne in chains from, p. 24. l. 11.] Vide Tacitus's account of Caraëtacus at the throne of Claudius.

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